



Colchester Borough Council : Colchester Northern Gateway Public Consultation – Representations Submitted on Behalf of the Colchester Gladiators American Football Club

Redevelopment Principles & Sports Proposals – Conflict With Local Needs

- 1) This representation is submitted on behalf of the Colchester Gladiators American Football Club (CGAFC) who are not supportive of the general approach and redevelopment principles, including the sports strategy proposed in the 'Northern Gateway' consultation document for the following reasons;
 - ❖ It proposes the unnecessary and undesirable redevelopment of the Mill Road Sports Ground and loss of established sport and recreational facilities;
 - ❖ It does not meet the existing or future sporting and social needs of the Gladiators;
 - ❖ It does not meet the existing or future sporting and social needs of other sport and recreational users of the Mill Road Sports Ground;
- 2) For these reasons it is considered that the proposals do not reflect the needs of the local sport and recreational community (except for the Colchester Rugby Club), which should be a key objective and driver in considering the future planning of the area. It is worth noting that this area of Colchester has been heavily developed in recent years, and the provision of sports and recreation facilities has not been expanded to meet the growing population. In fact, quite the opposite, as Myland has lost sports facilities in favour of housing developments in the past.

Background – Sports Proposals

- 3) It is understood that Colchester Rugby Club (CRFC) currently play in the London 1 North league which is a 'level 6' rugby union league, being 5 leagues below the Premiership (League 1). CRFC wish to secure promotion into National League 3 London & South East (level 5) and consider that new upgraded sports facilities would assist this general aim.
- 4) This aim has recently been reported in the Daily Gazette as likely to cost up to £5 million and is outlined as a proposal in the Northern Gateway consultation proposals, which envisages the redevelopment of the Mill Road Site for housing to help fund CRFC's aspirations.



- 5) Whilst the Gladiators organisation is encouraged that the Council are keen to support local sport in providing CRFC with new facilities, the Club fails to recognise where there is any justification for the redevelopment of the Mill Road Ground, and its loss as an established sport and recreational facility for existing and other potential sports users. The Gladiators are one of a number of sports Clubs who would also greatly benefit from the engagement that CRFC have had in this process. The Gladiators too have aspirations as a multi sport provider, and have historically engaged with the Council in attempting to deliver a structured long term development plan, something that could still be achieved by retaining the Mill Road site.

Colchester Gladiators American Football Club

- 6) The Gladiators are an established and well respected American Football Club which has been in being for 34 years since 1983.
- 7) It has three teams competing in the British American Football Association National League – a youth team catering for ages 14-16, a Junior team for ages 16-19, and a Senior team who compete in the British National Premier Division, the top tier of the sport in the UK, competing for the right to participate in European league and tournament competition. The Club also boasts three competitive Basketball Teams – a Mens' Senior team and a Ladies team, who compete in the Suffolk League Division 1 and the Essex Women's League respectively, as well as a fledgling Junior programme. The Club has an active Cricket team, who play friendly fixtures with clubs around Essex, and a group of dance/cheerleaders who are affiliated to the club.
- 8) The Gladiators have used a number of facilities around Colchester and Tendring in the past, in order to provide the facilities that our players, members, fans and visitors expect from top tier sport. Whilst games are played at the Mill Road facility, training usually takes place at the Colchester Academy Sports Centre. This co-location is a barrier to the club expanding its membership and centralising operations through a single site that become the true home of the club.
- 9) The Gladiators' playing needs are currently met to a bare minimum, as we have access to the changing facilities at the Mill Road site, and the use of a single pitch on site – a pitch which we mark ourselves. The club owns a large container at the site which we purchased and installed at our own cost to house our gameday equipment. This minimalist arrangement is obviously highly prohibitive in our attempts to develop our offer for members and spectators alike. It is worth noting that in the past, the club has won national awards from the NGB for its gameday and the provision for spectators, officials and visiting teams – something we have been unable to repeat at Mill Road to date.



- 10) Ample parking facilities are also available at the Mill Road Site which is a well known and accessible venue for visiting teams.

Gladiators - Existing & Future Needs

- 11) The Gladiators are an established, well organised, inclusive and financially viable multi sport organisation who are looking to maintain and enhance the sporting and social offer at Mill Road.
- 12) Whilst sharing sports ground facilities with CRFC has generally been manageable, the growth of the Rugby Club fixture commitment has presented logistical issues due to the 'overlapping' of the respective American Football and rugby seasons. The membership level of CRFC has also generally precluded the Gladiators from using the clubhouse bar and social facilities. Whilst we have actively engaged with CRFC regarding use of the bar, and have held functions there, they have not been cost effective, with CRFC requiring significant hire fees for use of the facility.
- 13) Logistical issues are usually encountered in April and September each year, imposing constraints on the fixture list for home venues, as the Cavaliers are generally unable to host 'home games' in April or September – this would be an ongoing constraint for any co located rugby, American Football and cricket facilities. Not only that, but the Gladiators host training sessions for the American Football teams up to three times each week – at present we're unable to train at the Mill Road facility through the winter and Spring, when the site is totally dominated by Rugby.
- 14) With this in mind, if CRFC were to relocate to another site north of the A12, this would present a logical and cost effective opportunity for the Gladiators to become further established at the site and make greater use of the Mill Road pitch and clubhouse facilities.
- 15) This would in turn help to boost the club membership, and provide further opportunities for the local community to participate in American Football, Cricket, and other activities at the site. It would help us facilitate the start of a women's American Football team, and allow flexibility to have the site used at least 4-5 times per week through the year. Our ties to the University and their sports teams may allow us to host high level University sport on site as well, and broaden the use of the Mill Road Site to become a true hub for sport in Colchester.
- 16) With this in mind the Gladiators have identified their existing and future needs as follows;



- ❖ 1 x full size cricket pitches served by good quality and established squares, which could be leased for use to local cricket clubs when not in use by the Gladiators;
- ❖ Changing room, shower and toilet facilities with capacity for 2 x home and away teams, American Football Officials, and cricket umpires and scorers (in terms of Officials, American Football can have between 4-7 officials for any given game, and team sizes can vary from 25-60 players, so it would be useful to have flexibility in the changing facilities). We'd also like to be able to host womens' cricket and American Football, so there is a requirement to have both male and female changing/shower/toilet facilities;
- ❖ Car parking facilities with capacity for 2 x home and away teams including officials, umpires, scorers and spectators, including buses for visiting away teams;
- ❖ Spectator viewing area, preferably part covered if feasible;
- ❖ Pavilion/Bar (and associated clubhouse facilities) sufficient in size to cater for 2 x home and away teams plus match officials – kitchen facilities sufficient to serve cricket teas and refreshments, and the potential for hot food for event and function catering;
- ❖ Use of a bar, club meeting room and indoor family social area(s);
- ❖ Provision of new American Football goal posts and electronic score board facilities in the short to medium term;
- ❖ Floodlit main pitch and training area for winter/evening training and showcase games;
- ❖ Installation of spectator seating in a bleacher style, alongside the main pitch;
- ❖ Longer term, the opportunity to develop an indoor facility, to include a basketball court, weight room and dance studio alongside the main clubhouse, for use of Club members and the general public;
- ❖ Longer term, possible redevelopment of the main pitch to be resurfaced as artificial turf, making it available for hockey, soccer, 5-side football,



American Football, netball and other sports;

17) With the above in mind, it is clear that the Mill Road Sports Ground would provide all the facilities necessary to meet these needs in the short term, and could be modified/developed to meet the longer term developmental objectives of the Gladiators as a multi sports club. On the basis that the four main CRFC pitches are not utilised for rugby during the months of April and September, it would still be feasible to accommodate other sports clubs at the Mill Road Site, such as the;

- ❖ Eastern Rhinos Rugby League Club – who currently play on the pitches in the south west part of the Mill Road site;
- ❖ Colchester Cavaliers Cricket Club – who currently play on the pitches in the eastern part of the Mill Road Site;
- ❖ Colchester and District Archery Club – who currently play in the west part of the site
- ❖ Icení Dog Training Club – who are located in the west part of the site;

Conclusions

18) It is evident from a review of the current approach, redevelopment principles and sports strategy proposed by the Northern Gateway consultation, that it does not reflect (or address) the sport and social needs of locally based sports and recreational users (except for the Rugby Club).

19) The proposals to redevelop an established and well used sports and recreational facility (and asset of community value) are therefore unjustified, and would prejudice the existing and future needs of the local sport and recreational community. As a proposal it is therefore considered to be inappropriate, and does not make the best use of 'fit for purpose' sports infrastructure and related facilities.

20) The facility could be adapted and quickly established as a major multi-sport hub within Colchester, and developed into an elite sports facility within East Anglia to cater for numerous sports clubs and activities, addressing key goals in Sport England strategy and the Sports and Recreation Alliance objectives.

21) It is requested that the Borough Council amend its proposals to 'retain' the established and accessible sports ground and associated facilities at Mill Road, and support its continued use and investment to meet the local needs outlined in this submission.